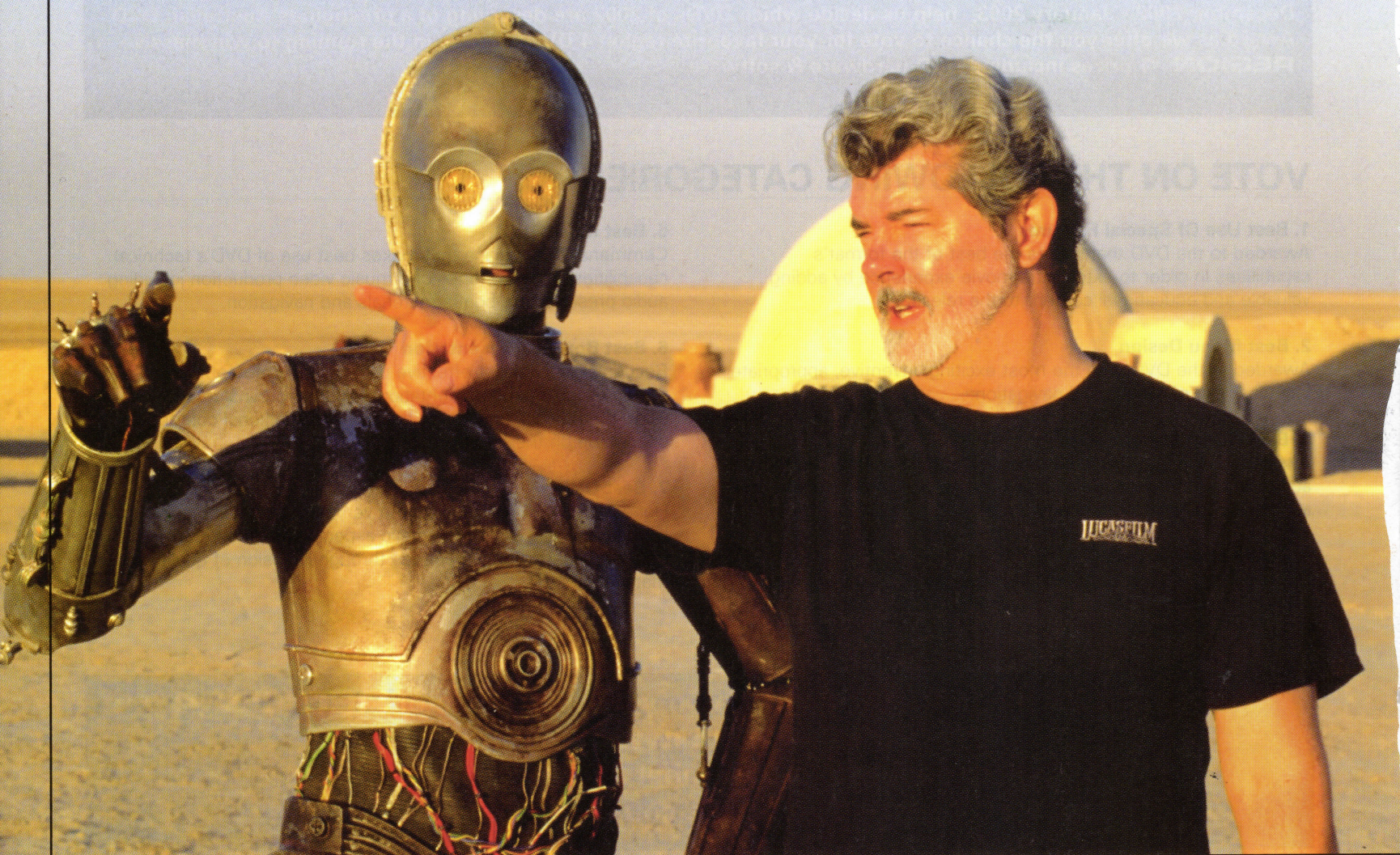


LIGHT, SABRE, ACTION!

From within the hallowed halls of the Skywalker Ranch, George Lucas talks family, architecture, shooting in Sydney and the burden of the world's largest franchise.

By Katherine Tulich





George Lucas is precisely on time. It's 3.00pm on the dot and he is waiting on the staircase leading to his expansive upstairs office at his company's headquarters, the Skywalker Ranch in northern California. The inside of his office is pin neat, conservatively decorated with lines of bookcases and expensive artwork, but surprisingly for one of the most successful movie makers of all time, devoid of any celluloid mementos... no posters, no awards, no framed pictures hugging equally famous colleagues.

For the man who single handedly made movie tie-in merchandise as successful a franchise as McDonalds, there is not one furry ewok, fuzzy wookie, stormtrooper uniform or mock lightsabre.

"This is the only thing I have," Lucas confesses as he leads me behind a door to the office's smaller annex. It's a glass case enclosing the Imperial speeder from *Return of the Jedi*, the original model that was used for the film, signed by the actors and technicians.

Even the three Lucas children are not indulged. "We keep our home very light on the *Star Wars* stuff," Lucas comments. (although his two youngest children; 14-year-old Katie and 9-year-old Jett got to be their own action figures playing

small parts in the recent *Attack of the Clones*.)

After a cursory greeting Lucas settles into a white lounge chair in the centre of his office. Not that the spectacular Victorian mansion we're sitting in feels much like an office complex. Outside the green expanses of hills are dotted with deer and cattle, while down the road an organic vegetable garden is being harvested. It's hard to believe this bucolic setting has 200 workers manufacturing, creating and organising one of the most hi-tech film companies in the world.

"When I got out of film school in LA and I first came up here everyone thought I was crazy. They said you can't go home and make movies. But I grew up here, I liked it here and I wanted to stay here. I didn't see any point in going down to LA to be a part of it all," he says. He may have created most of their biggest blockbusters but he has doggedly shunned Hollywood.

"Down there they hang out together, talk together, think together, come up with ideas together. I prefer to be somewhere where I come up with my own ideas and do it my own way."

The myth and might of *Star Wars* may be legendary but its 58-year-old creator is surprisingly diminutive in stature and presence. Standing

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only a medium sized 5' 6", his stocky body wearing his de rigeur uniform of red plaid shirt, blue jeans and runners, his thick mop of wavy hair and beard liberally peppered with white hair. While his voice is timid, often mumbling the end of sentences, it takes only a few minutes in his company to inhale his stoic single-mindedness and unassuming assertiveness.

"He's the most laid back guy in the world," says *Attack of the Clones* producer Rick McCallum. "But there is definitely an iron fist behind that velvet glove."

Ask him to describe the differences between filming the original *Star Wars* in 1977 and the current batch and he distills it down to a matter of interference. "I have less people intruding on it. Before you had thousands of studio executives come in and try to tell you how to make a movie, now I don't have any of that. Not dealing with all of that probably gives me 30% more time than any filmmaker in LA has," he says matter of factly.

But his control is not maniacal. He's also known as a benevolent boss (he gave away 25% of his share in the first *Star Wars* to colleagues and friends) and

has little time for star egos. He doesn't squander his wealth. He has one family house (in nearby San Anselmo) and ploughs most of his fortune back into expanding his businesses.

Married only once to film editor Marcia Griffin (the two divorced in 1982), he is a doting parent to his three adopted children (he adopted his first child Amanda in 1981 while still married, Katie and Jett he later adopted as a sole parent). While his personal life is usually kept well under wraps, he admits his children always have first priority.

"That's why I basically didn't do much for about ten years or more. I stopped in order to take care of my kids... just to be there when they came back from school, to be able to go to parent teacher conferences. But now they're old enough to hang out with me on the set and I work during the summer when they're not in school," he says.

One of his main indulgences has been the Skywalker Ranch, developed from land he purchased in 1980. Situated one hour north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge on a road coincidentally called Lucas Valley Road, it has become over the years like a giant Legoland for Lucas. "You could call this my hobby", he admits. "I love architecture. I started out wanting to be an architect. I love designing buildings, so when I got to the point I could build things, then that's what I did."

Like the used "universe" of *Star Wars*, the Skywalker Ranch is new but looks old. "I've always been interested in anthropology and archaeology. I'm really more interested in older things. That's where my mind is at, but at the same time I'm a person working in a very hi-tech medium and I have to pay attention to it," says the filmmaker.

The Lucas empire now extends to five companies including technical, interactive, video games and merchandise licensing. "I always told my father (who worked as a small town businessman in their home town of Modesto, California) the last thing I'll ever

do is run a company and here I am running a big company," he says drily. "It's only because I'm doing the kinds of work that I do in terms of fantasy and science fiction I've been forced into the leading edge of technology. It's like the invention of red. I happen to be one of those guys that paint a lot of red so I have to invent the red paint."

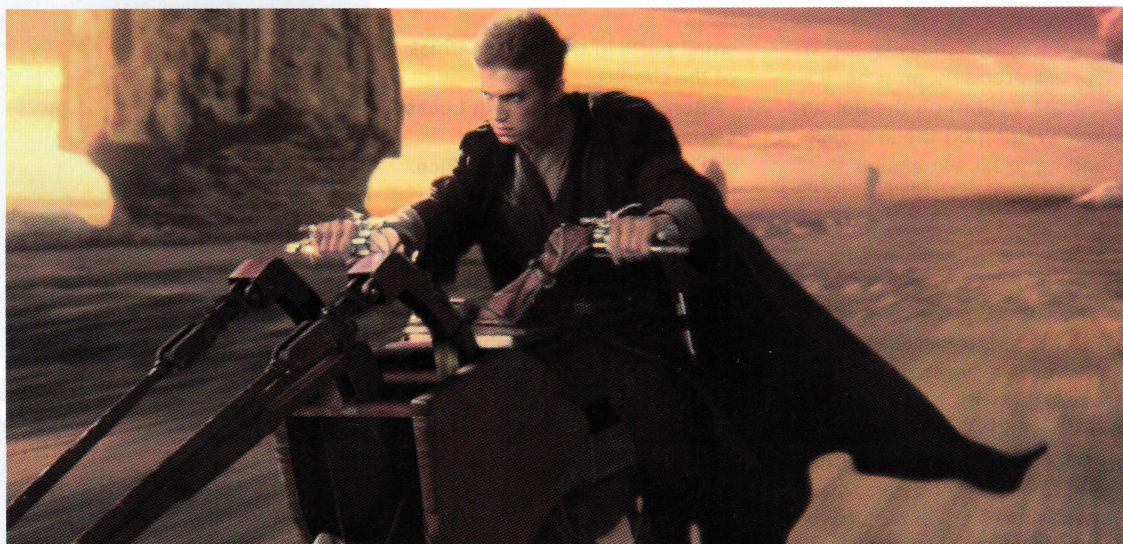
Eighty percent of the principal photography of *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* was shot at Sydney's Fox Studios and Lucas speaks glowingly of his experience there. "I had a great cast (many supporting roles are Australians and New Zealanders) and a very efficient crew," he says.

"We were stretching Sydney in terms of large set studio productions so we've helped to develop a whole vocabulary of talent and expertise in doing these kind of movies."

Lucas returns to Sydney in June 2003 to shoot *Episode III* and predicts the city could become a future second home. "I think it's one of the best places in the world to film," he says. "There are many other projects I have in mind beyond *Star Wars*, so I plan to be bouncing between Sydney and here for some time to come." After *Episode III* is complete in 2005 the *Star Wars* myth maker plans to retire the lightsabres permanently.

"It takes me 10 years to do one of these trilogies. I thought very long and hard about going back into it," he admits. "I started when I was 28 and will finish when I'm 61. That's a lot of my life taken up with this. I took a long break and really wasn't sure whether I ever wanted to come back to it. But I came to the realisation that I was going to have to accept the fact that regardless of whatever else I do, *Star Wars* is always what I'll be recognised for."

***Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* is released on DVD Nov 13 and is reviewed on page 68.**



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